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ABSTRACT

This paper describes five sources of stress found to affect the acculturation of Chinese immigrants in the San Francisco area. The stresses are physical from adjusting to a new environment; biological from diet and immunity changes; social from new jobs and schools; cultural from political, language, and religious changes; and psychological from values and beliefs changes. It states that career adjustment in the form of career reconstruction plays an important role in the acculturation process and in reducing social, cultural, and psychological stress. It reports that while Chinese people are reluctant to use counseling and mental health services, career counseling appears to be an exception because it is perceived as having little to do with mental health issues, although most will terminate the relationship after one meeting. The paper states that quick termination is due to failure to establish a trusting and safe relationship. When working with new immigrants, the paper suggests that counselors need to do the following: (1) establish a trusting and therapeutic environment; (2) understand the client's needs and develop realistic goals for the client; (3) teach the client information processing and networking skills; (4) apply appropriate directive counseling techniques; and (5) reinforce the client's work on a career development plan. (Contains 20 references.) (JDM)

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Career Counseling for New Chinese Immigrants:

Clinical Issues and Practical Recommendations

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San Francisco has been a major gathering place for Chinese immigrants in the United States since the 19th century; the Chinese immigrant population in San Francisco has doubled since 1965 (Lee, 1983). With the New Immigration Act of 1991, more Chinese immigrate to the States and a large proportion of them settle in San Francisco.

The degree with which immigrants develop satisfaction with their new environment is often dictated by the acculturation process. There are five sources of stress that affect the acculturating group (Berry et al, 1985):

1. Physical stress: The group must adjust to a new physical environment with a different climate and different housing.
2. Biological stress: The group may have to change their diet and is certainly lacking immunity from many diseases.
3. Social stress: The group will be affected by changes in employment, education and ethnicity status.
4. Cultural stress: The group will encounter new politics, new language, new religions and new economics.
5. Psychological stress: As a result of the above stressors, the group may have their values, beliefs, attitudes and identities changed.

Unlike others, Chinese immigrants often obtain support from the local Chinese community in facilitating the adjustment to the physical and biological stressors. There is considerably less community support in relating to the other stressors. What has been found to be consistently true is that career adjustment in the form of career reconstruction plays an important role in the acculturation process and in reducing social, cultural and psychological stress. In fact, Lee (1983) found that downward mobility or status inconsistency due to less than satisfactory employment led to the Chinese immigrants low self esteem, insecurity and depression. Many of the immigrants had a prior professional status and lost it when they came to the States. There appeared to be somewhat less depression among those immigrants who were able to find work that they had some familiarity with.

It can be presumed that there is and will continue to be a vast need for career counseling services among this population for some time to come. Yet there is virtually no literature that speaks to the intertwining of career reconstruction with immigration. The purpose of this article is to integrate cultural factors and career development theories into a clinical process framework that will help practitioners to counsel and assist Chinese immigrants with the career reconstruction process.

1. Beginning Assumptions

Career reconstruction is used to define the creation of a new career when there is little or no possibility of using one's past experience, education, or training. It is certainly a term that can be applied to individuals who have been physically disabled and it can be applied to individuals who have a trade that is no longer needed by the culture. Keypunch operators, blacksmiths and milk wagon drivers represent the latter. It is also a

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term that can be used to describe the career counseling process for new immigrants. Many immigrant professionals will never be able to apply their crafts and professional trades, they will be forced to develop entirely new careers. Unfortunately these new reconstructed careers, more often than not, result in downward mobility and that leads to some of the psychological stresses noted earlier.

The literature that speaks to counseling Chinese clients (Sue & Sue, 1990; Alber, 1983; Leong & Kim, 1991) relies almost exclusively on suggestions that are based on cultural explanations. These may be quite inappropriate or even biased against new Chinese immigrants. The Chinese immigrants' background is complex; simple interpretations are not sufficient to enhance the counseling process. For example, in mainland China, due to the dramatic social and political change, the traditional patterns of social relations that espoused filial piety and respect for elders are no longer taken into account by younger generations. The more traditional belief in moral and knowledge fulfillment through education has been replaced by a belief in quick benefits through speculation. In Hong Kong and Taiwan, older generations will preserve traditional values while the younger generation rejects conservatism and tradition. Younger immigrants crave autonomy, self expression, self assertion and individually oriented achievement (Lee, 1983). When a Chinese immigrant seeks career counseling, he or she can not be attended to as a 3rd or 4th generation Chinese-American.

While studies have shown that Chinese people were reluctant to use counseling and mental health services (Atkinson et al 1978; Sue & Sue, 1974; Tseng & Wu, 1985) career counseling appears to be an exception because it is perceived as having little to do with mental health issues. Still, most Chinese immigrant clients terminate the relationship after the first meeting. While a variety of reasons have been given for this fact, including the immigrants lack of assertiveness or cooperativeness, it is the thesis of this paper that quick termination is often due to the failure to establish a trusting and safe relationship.

Chinese people are very group oriented. After identifying with a group, they will conform to the behavioral norms of the group. They express their beliefs and emotional conflicts only to those who are considered to be part of the in group. Therefore an out group counselor will have little impact because the Chinese immigrant client will seldom risk "losing face" to culturally different or out group counselor. Thus, the immigrants either avoid in depth contacts or only trust authority figures. To provide career reconstruction services to these clients, the following approaches need to be considered:

A. It is crucial for the counselor to articulate the client's cultural identity. Ethnic identified clients prefer ethnically similar or culturally sensitive counselors more than the biculturally identified or mainstream identified counselors (Atkinson et al, 1990). Lack of ethnic congruence between the group status of the client or counselor may necessitate a referral.

B. It is an advantage for the counselor to speak the client's dialect, although working with an interpreter can be all right (Lee, 1983). Counselors need to be aware that the

language barrier can be used as a defense mechanism by the client, an excuse for avoiding change, challenge and independence. The barrier may also hinder the development of a trusting and safe relationship; weak communication adds to stress and anxiety (Dornic, 1985). To the new Chinese immigrants, nothing is more alienating than communicating personal affairs in a second language. A counselor's attempt to have the client communicate in English identifies the counselor as an out group member and typically terminates the counseling relationship after the first session. Immigrant clients may use the language barrier to test the counselor's credibility.

C. The counselor must be willing to answer any of the client's career related questions at the first interview even though the counselor may not know what the client wants. These seemingly desultory and innocent questions may be part of the client's testing of the counselor's credibility. Nondirected or indirected clinical approaches may reflect upon the counselor as an out group member, unwilling to help the immigrant client.

2. Working Alliance

There are two stages to the career reconstruction of immigrant clients, a preparatory stage and an establishment stage (Krau, 1983). The preparatory stage is often the most troubling. According to Super (1969), as people develop, they compare their view of themselves with occupations they enter, trying to find those that are congruent with their view. In the collectivist Chinese society, this model is still applicable, although the self view is modified by the group's ideology. Self assertion and individual achievement occur only when there is a reference or role model that can be consistent with the ideological framework.

In their own country, Chinese people have the appropriate framework and environment to explore their career choices. In a new country, the environment and reference frames no longer exist. The immigrants are exposed to many more choices, have little information about these choices and encounter new and different employment processes such as resumes, use of the internet, voice mail, civil service tests, exams, licensing restrictions, stress interviews and the like. Moreover, they are no longer able to compare their group oriented view to the references around them. Indeed, a former physician may see a former college professor washing dishes in a restaurant. Too, developmentally they may have been in a career maintenance stage prior to immigration; thereafter they are most likely to begin a new career exploration stage consistent with Super's (1969) developmental career theory.

Reentering the exploration stage of career development for many of the immigrants results in disappointment, confusion and depression. According to Maslow (1954) everyone has basic needs that are arranged in hierarchical importance from physiological to self actualization needs. When lower level needs are met, higher order need fulfillment can be pursued. Chinese immigrants came to the U.S. with the expectations that their needs would be met whether they were lower order (economic) or higher order (political). Most did not plan on a career change and did not know that they might fail to fulfill their expectations because of the career change.

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Downward career mobility prevents the immigrants from pursuing unmet needs. For example, a professor from China working in a Chinatown restaurant may earn tenfold what s/he earned in Beijing. But the professor never has the time to pursue the former higher order scholarship. Antithetically, a successful accountant from Hong Kong, escaping the shadow of 1997, worries about how to maintain an accountant's lifestyle by earning three times less of a salary in the U.S. Immigrants may find that their new life is not what they anticipated. Disappointment can lead to confusion from a distorted self image. The client has a new experience of floundering in a quagmire of identity issues both vocational and cultural. The client does not know whether s/he is a professional person or a laborer. The confusion may lead to avoidance where the immigrant refuses to learn the new culture and explore new but different career opportunities. S/he may live in a Chinese neighborhood and stay in work requiring little or no English.

The confusion can ultimately lead to clinical depression, guilt and self blame. Some of the Chinese immigrants repress their negative feelings and develop a coping mechanism whereby they believe that their suffering will be exchanged for a better life for their children. Regardless, without assistance, the depression will remain and these clients will probably never return to their former personal and career development life stage.

3. Counseling Process

Chinese immigrants expect a counselor to engage in a problem solving approach; they hope the counselor will fix their problems. Actually, Williamson's (1934) trait and factor career counseling approach initially appears to meet these client needs quite well. But this theoretical approach is based on American culture as are most other popular approaches. They are not applicable for some of the following reasons.

Chinese immigrants are educated far differently than American students. A student from Hong Kong who never passed high school physics may do extremely well in college physics in America. A factory manager who supervised a 5000 worker factory in China may not have the type of leadership and management skills that an American manager would expect. This is because the Chinese manager, who might even be timid, held the position as the result of a family member's status as a high Party official.

Accordingly, new counseling methods with a different framework need to be developed. Several recent approaches have some components that may work for the immigrants. Rounds and Tracey (1990) have a four step information processing approach that postulates person-environment congruence through information processing skills. This technique focuses upon teaching the client problem solving. It does demand that the counselor understand that Chinese people use information not because it works but rather because it fits their ideological framework. In addition, Chinese clients have great respect for authority and if the counselor is perceived as an in group authority, the client may be willing to engage in working assiduously (Triandis, 1982). The approach is quite directive involving the development of plans based upon goal setting and working toward taking action on those plans.

Krumboltz' (1976) theory can also work because it perceives career development as a learning process. Individuals will develop those skills that have produced positive

outcomes. This self observation generalization theory fits in nicely with a collectivist culture's ideological framework. While the immigrants may not be exposed to many of the occupations that exist in America, they can certainly make decisions on the basis of the universal impact of positive reinforcement.

Finally, cognitive therapy (Beck, 1976; Meichenbaum, 1977), although it is not developed as a career development theory, appears to be quite effective with its information processing sequences. It emphasizes helping clients to challenge negative and irrational beliefs, develop alternatives, and remove themselves from the depression loop caused by their unsatisfactory career reconstruction. By teaching clients to question beliefs, the counselor automatically takes on a supportive and authoritative mantel. Chinese people believe that only the person with credibility is able to confront others with structured reasoning. The cognitive approach not only establishes the therapeutic alliance, it also helps to confront the clients negative thoughts.

The cognitive techniques can be used in conjunction with the other already mentioned theories and help to establish a safe space to explore, process and experience success. For example, if a client is concerned about how a language problem will take away from performance, the counselor may question this concern as unfounded because the client assumes that all interviewers look down upon people who do not speak as fluently as natives. In fact, the language defense might be a part of the client's avoidance processing. The counselor can begin to understand the negative belief system and replace it with healthier and more productive thoughts.

4. Summary

Helping new Chinese immigrants with career reconstruction is a most difficult task. Many formal studies address only the awareness of cultural differences in counseling but fail to provide practical recommendations, not to mention goal oriented counseling. When working with the new immigrants the counselor needs to do the following:

1. Establish in group authority by developing a trusting and safe therapeutic alliance,
2. Understand the client's needs and develop realistic goals for the client and serve to reduce social, cultural and psychological stress,
3. Teach the client information processing and networking skills,
4. Apply appropriate directive counseling techniques,
5. Reinforce the client's working on a career reconstruction, career development plan.

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